

9/15/05

TO: Andrew Marcus, Chair
University Senate

FROM: Deborah Baumgold, Chair
Undergraduate Council

RE: Report of 2004-5 Undergraduate Council Business

The major items of business before the Undergraduate Council this year were the Oregon Transfer Module, in the fall, and grade inflation, in the spring.

Oregon Transfer Module

The Oregon Transfer Module is a one-year module designed to facilitate transfer of coursework among institutions of higher education statewide. It complements the existing AA/OT degree, which requires two years of coursework. The OTM includes both General Education and Elective coursework and is designed to be compatible with the degree requirements of all state institutions, although students may also need to complete institution-specific General Education requirements. During the development of the OTM, the Undergraduate Council advised the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Karen Sprague, who was a member of the authoring body, the Joint Boards Articulation Council. The OTM was subsequently endorsed by all seven Oregon University System institutions.

In connection with the OTM, the Council had a favorable discussion of a proposed statewide articulation system – ATLAS (Articulation and Transfer Linked Audit System). ATLAS, expanding on the DARS system now in place on campus, is a statewide course applicability system. It will enable students and advisers across the state to assess transfer credit options and to conduct degree auditing.

Grade Inflation

In the winter and spring quarters, the Council undertook consideration of grade inflation at the University. Mark Thoma worked with the Registrar's office to develop data to illuminate the extent and causes of inflation. They sampled the top twenty courses (in terms of enrollment) in each School and each division within CAS for four sample years, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004. Some preliminary findings are presented below. However, this is a continuing investigation that will be before the Council in 2005-6.

The data show that UO has seen grade inflation over the period 1992-2004, as have most institutions nationwide. Overall, at the UO, 7% more As and Bs were given at the end of the sample period relative to the beginning, and 10% more As. This level of inflation appears to be no worse, and perhaps somewhat better, than that reported by peer institutions. There was also grade inflation at the high school level during this period: GPAs improved, while SAT scores showed modest increases only in math scores. Based on these data, it is difficult to attribute the rising proportion of high grades to increases in the quality of the undergraduate body.

There is considerable variability in grade inflation at the UO across schools and divisions, and among course levels. In our sample, the change in percentage of As and Bs over the entire period ranged from a low of -6.6% to a high of 18.7%.

Review of the data also revealed an unexpectedly large proportion of A+ grades. A question for future analysis is whether this is a general phenomena or the result of skewed grading in a few courses. Also, we recommend that next year's Council survey the practices of units across campus regarding grading guidelines and, on the basis of the survey, recommend "best practices" for the campus.

Other Business

The Undergraduate Council is charged with advising the Office of Academic Affairs on programmatic proposals and related academic matters. During 2004-5, we considered the following proposals:

1. name change of Multi-Media Design program to Digital Arts;
2. elimination of pre-Psychology major;
3. OUS proposal regarding the foreign-language admission requirement;
4. proposal for new majors in Germanic Languages and Literature;
5. Scholastic Review Committee proposal regarding the Y grade;
6. name change of the School of Music to the School of Music and Dance.

In addition, the Council advised the Registrar's office regarding transcript symbols for Group-satisfying courses; and reaffirmed that Group-satisfying courses should be offered with both Graded and P/NP options. Discussion was initiated with the Educational Technology Committee regarding the most effective use of technology in undergraduate education; we hope the communication between these groups will expand in future.

cc: Gwen Steigelman